

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

This submission accompanies an RCE and serves as a further response to the Final Office Action of October 4, 2007 and the Advisory Action mailed January 9, 2008 issued in connection with the instant application. A Petition for Extension of Time (two months) and the fee therefor are submitted herewith.

Allowance of the pending claims is earnestly solicited, including on the basis that in each of independent claims 1, 19 and 22, the atmosphere blocking plate is defined as “a plate configured to be substantially the same in planar shape and size as said substrate holding/rotating element”.

In contrast, and as is apparent from Figures 2 and 3 of Taniyama, et. al. (6,247,479), the nozzle assembly 31 thereof is not a plate which is of substantially the same planar shape and size as the table 13 which holds the wafer W.

Nor is it appropriate to consider the claimed atmosphere blocking plate of the instant claims to be a mere modification in shape and size of the nozzle assembly 31 of the cited reference. In contrast to the cited prior art, the claimed atmosphere blocking plate is capable of covering the entire major surface of the substrate and the claims specifically recite that this blocking plate is arranged oppositely and proximately to the entire major surface of the substrate which is being held by the substrate holding/rotating element. In this unique configuration, the atmosphere blocking plate is particularly suitable for separating the atmosphere over the entire major surface of the substrate. In contrast, the nozzle assembly 31 of Taniyama is substantially smaller than the table 13 which holds the wafer W. This makes it absolutely impossible to cover the wafer W in a manner which is effective to separate outside and atmospheric air. In this respect, and on account of the careful selection of the precise dimensions of the blocking plate, it cannot be deemed that the prior art discloses the atmosphere blocking plate of the instant claims.

A further distinguishing feature of the claimed atmosphere blocking plate of claims 1 and 19, is that the plate is rotatably driven. Taniyama, in contrast, teaches that the nozzle assembly 31 is swingingly mounted between a home position and a use position, as described at Fig. 3, column 7, lines 63-66. Thus, it fails to teach any plate which is rotatably driven, whereby

the nozzle assembly 31 of the prior art is both structurally and functionally quite distinct from the atmosphere blocking plate of the instant claims.

On the basis of the foregoing remarks, it is respectfully submitted that each of the independent claims in the application clearly distinguish over the prior art of record. The remaining dependent claims include and present various limitations which are not shown in the prior art in combination with the structure of the main claims and, as such, are even further distanced from the prior art of record and are patentable on their own merits.

Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider the application, allow the claims as amended and pass this case to issue.

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Respectfully submitted,



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